The Politics and Poetics of Authenticity

Indonesian Migrant Women and Cultural Representation in Perth, Australia

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Abstract

This article provides a novel analysis of how a marginalised Indonesian marriage migrant dance group, in Perth Australia, engage with an Indonesian transnational discourse of 'authentic' cultural performance. The story of this Indonesian amateur housewife dance group and their performance of a generic Indonesian boat dance that became a Madurese fisherman folk dance, shows how they can express both political and poetic forms of authenticity. They attribute cultural identification to their dance which is a strategically essentialising act. They also enjoy the dance movement which they embody, some according to their beliefs in certain stereotypes, which is a poetic experience and manifestation of authenticity. Thus, the article argues for alternative ways Anthropologist can address the discourse of authenticity.

Keywords

Indonesian migrant women – anthropology of performance – discourse of authenticity

Scholars working with Indonesian female dancers have analysed the various expressions of the performer’s agency in relation to the Indonesian state's struc-
turing discourses (Kellar 2004; Hughes-Freeland 2008; Hatley 2008; Palermo 2009; Larasati 2013). This article argues that there needs to be a new interpretation of both political and poetic responses to the Indonesian state’s structuring discourse of ‘authentic’ cultural performance. It provides a transnational perspective of Indonesian female dancers in Perth, Western Australia. My ethnographic focus is on a dance group called Srikandi,¹ comprised of housewives who came to Perth as migrants holding spousal visas as partners of white, Australian men. I examine the group members’ engagement with three transnational Indonesian state institutions. Using anthropological theory and methodology, this article questions not what constitutes an ‘authentic performance’, but how the research participants understand, engage with, and respond to the discourse through both political and poetic acts. By ‘political’ I mean in terms of the politics of representation; in other words, the reasoning behind who gets to represent Indonesian culture in Perth, and how. By ‘poetic’ I mean the embodied feeling of authenticity which dancers experience through their movements and which the audience members experience through sensory reception. According to Ram (2000a), a dance is thus ‘authentic’ when it feels ‘authentic’ to the dancer and/or the audience.

‘Authenticity’ and ‘inauthenticity’ are important concepts when explaining a transnational phenomenon; the concepts should be treated as a discourse that provokes different meanings with different stakeholders. In a migrant setting some Indonesian stakeholders hold a claim over how Indonesian culture should be represented, with certain state institutions claiming to hold the source of legitimacy. This article particularly looks at three transnational Indonesian state institutions: the consulate in Perth, its sponsored women’s group Dharma Wanita, and an Indonesian migrant association that advertises itself as being the consulate’s predecessor and is providing similar services as in the past. These institutions adhere to a hierarchy of authenticity through which a performance is classified as authentic or not authentic. Classical dance is situated at the top as the most valued; folk dance that is performed by members of the cultural group to which that dance belongs is valued second in the hierarchy. For both dance classifications it is regarded as important that the dancers have been trained professionally, and/or have performed since childhood. Created ‘national’ dances, such as the newly choreographed Indonesian boat dance performed by an amateur, hobby dance group, are considered at the bottom of the value hierarchy and are thus considered inauthentic representa-

¹ All names of dancers, dance groups, and other Indonesian community members in Perth are pseudonyms.
tions of Indonesian culture. Amongst migrants, a hierarchy of state-imposed discourse regarding Indonesian cultural representation exists, and they enact their own agency through performance within this structure.

The political act of the Indonesian female dancers involves employing both formal and informal power relations with these representative Indonesian institutions. In order to strategically align their created, ‘national’ dance performance, or *tari kreasi*, and to have it regarded as an authentic ‘folk dance’ they essentialize a cultural identity to their performance, and enact their own version of the Indonesian state’s cultural policy. The poetic act involves the agency of these women in expressing themselves through their choreographed dances. Based on their experiences as Indonesian marriage migrants in Australia, they use the stereotypes (such as being a mail order bride or a bar girl) associated with belonging to a housewives’ amateur dance group as a positive feature to ‘enliven’ their dances. They also enjoy the dance movements they embody (some according to their beliefs in certain cultural stereotypes), which is a poetic experience and manifestation of authenticity.

The theoretical debate in the anthropology of performance suggests authenticity can only be experienced as either a political or a poetic act (Reid 1998; Ram 2000b; Henry, Magowan and Murray 2000). This article’s argument that both political and poetic forms of authenticity can be experienced at the same time is a critical response to theoretical and empirical problems that shape the researcher’s engagements with participants’ cultural performance. Addressing the discourse of authenticity as both a political and a poetic act is important, not only in understanding expressions of cultural identity, particularly in migration settings, but also as a factor that aids anthropologists’ understandings of the power relations that exist in a community of study and the agentic possibilities enacted by research participants. Thus, female Indonesian migrant dancers negotiate their position within the discourse of authenticity, which is the discourse of the dominant voice of the migrant Indonesian representative expressed through the three transnational Indonesian state institutions.

Most of the dancers in this housewives’ amateur dance group are Indonesian citizens. Through their marriage to white, Australian men they hold spousal visas and are also permanent residents of Australia. It is important thus to contextualize their identity as housewives around the gender discourse that exists in Australia as a migrant destination. The proximity of the two countries as neighbours means that Indonesia and Indonesian women have been historically implicated in Australia’s neo-Orientalist discourse in which Asian women are represented as exotic, hypersexed, submissive, passive, dominated, and feminine (Broinowski 1995). There is a historical fear of Asia that is coupled
with a desire of it as the 'opposite other', similar to Europe's desire for an Asian colony. As the fourth-most-populous nation and the largest Muslim country on Australia's doorstep, Indonesia is part of Australia's neo-colonialist imagination of the 'yellow peril' and the invading hordes of Asians (Broinowski 1995). Asian women have been used to represent Asia as a whole and to reinforce the idea that the perceived threat of Asia can be tamed and controlled.

Asian women marrying white, Australian men are faced with the discourses of hypergamy (the marrying up of third-world women with first-world men), 'mail order brides', and the issue of remittances (Saroca 1997; Robinson 1996a, 2000). The mail-order-bride discourse normalized and naturalized the idea of such marriages as purely economic transactions, through which Asian women are commoditized as sexual objects instead of subjects, and which in turn presents the Asian women in such marriages as gold diggers (Saroca 1997; Robinson 1996a, 2000). Nevertheless, Asian migrant women in Australia have also been depicted as easily assimilated and as 'safe' representatives of multiculturalism, particularly through the smiling Asian woman depicted on a poster advertising multiculturalism and immigration with the slogan 'you can be part of the family too' (Ang 1996). The gender discourse centres on Asian women being seen as truly feminine, and also on the East as a source of traditional family values. Thus by marrying an Asian bride there is hope of a stable family and married life (Robinson 1996a:56).

In Western Australia, where mining is the largest industry and the most profitable for the Australian nation, the majority of these Indonesian women's Australian husbands work as miners, geologists, or contractors, or have related work as developers/estate agents; they all have good incomes. While the Indonesian wives are therefore usually economically well-off and have middle-class lifestyles, they do not necessarily have social and cultural capital. The women's perceived low social and cultural capital centres on prevailing stereotypes in both the Indonesian and the Australian communities, where they are viewed as lower-class 'bar girls' based on the assumption that the miners would have met their 'Asian' wives in Indonesian mining towns at bars, where the women are seen as akin to prostitutes. In Indonesia as a 'sending' country of marriageable migrant women, the stigma is also related to the stereotype of 'Western' men leading an expatriate's permissive lifestyle in Indonesia and seeking out Indonesian women who are permissive bar girls (Murray 1991; Richter 2008:21–45; Robinson 1996b). Putting on Indonesian cultural perfor-
manances therefore becomes a means for these migrant women to increase their status and standing within the Indonesian migrant community.

For these women, dancing began as an interesting pastime to socialize with other migrant women like themselves, but the group developed to the point where they started performing on weekends and at events such as the various multicultural festivals in and around the city of Perth, as well as for migrant associations and festivals run by the Indonesian consulate. As a city that shares the same time zone and is only a four-hour flight away from Jakarta, Perth has all the amenities—such as Indonesian supermarkets, restaurants, shops, community groups, and religious facilities in the Indonesian language—that help to maintain a transnational, Indonesian lifestyle. Transnationalism is the process by which immigrants forge and sustain ties between their ‘host’ country and their original ‘home’ (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994). Cultural performance is also one of the traditional methods of ‘soft power’ cultural diplomacy (Li 2012) used by members of the diasporic population, which has an important intermediary role in relations between the country of origin and the host country. A state’s policy of engaging with its diasporic community overseas is aimed at discursively producing a state-centric transnational society, extending rights to, and extracting obligations from, the diaspora (Gamlen 2006:22).

Female marriage migrants nevertheless have a marginal status in the Indonesian community in relation to those whose status does not depend on marriage migration. Among the committee members of the Dharma Wanita group are those who are either wives of Indonesian diplomats or work as staff at the Indonesian consulate, those who hold the dominant discourse on ‘authentic’ Indonesian culture, and those who have professional dancing experience and are cultural ‘gatekeepers’, such as those committee members who are also part of the migrant community association. Some of these dancers are also members of the Dharma Wanita group and partake in the Dharma Wanita cultural activities at the Indonesian consulate, but since they are not the wives of Indonesian diplomats they never hold the position of committee member. In essence they are peripheral to the Dharma Wanita group and not part of the inner circle.

To gain the acceptance of the inner circle of the Dharma Wanita group and win accolades in Perth’s Indonesian migrant community as more than just an
amateur housewives’ group, the dancers in the group implemented strategies to ensure that their dances took more acceptable forms. However, their identity as marriage migrants and the associated gendered and negative stereotype meant that their role as an ‘authentic’ Indonesian cultural representative in Perth was always questioned. The structure of this article will therefore be divided into two in order to study two events, and will address both the power and agency shaping the experience of the research participants, and in this case their dance performances in a migrant setting.

The first ethnographic event was the creation of an Indonesian boat dance, which illustrates the start of my research journey with the dance group (Srikandi) and their understanding of the discourse of authenticity as held by audience and committee members of the Indonesian Migrant Community Association and the Dharma Wanita (Women’s Association). The ethnography is interspersed with the debates in anthropology on how to address the discourse of authenticity in cultural performance as political or poetic acts. Using the dancers’ initial discussion and reaction to this discourse, I begin to show how they are able to express authenticity in both strategic and embodied ways.

The second ethnography emphasizes the ability of the dancers to successfully employ new ways of engaging with the discourse of authenticity through both political and poetic forms in their performance. The dance group re-choreographed the Indonesian boat dance into a Madurese fishermen’s folk dance, which passed the consulate’s standard as an ‘authentic’ regional dance and was enjoyed by the Australian audience at the Perth Royal Show. Through this dance, the dancers performed a strategic, self-essentializing political act together with the poetic act of embodying a Madurese ‘showy and bold’ cultural stereotype—by moving in bold, gyrating ways that they considered appealing and sexy, as associated with Orientalist perceptions of Indonesian women who were married to white, Australian men.

The two ethnographies in this article therefore show the myriad ways in which the dancers react through both political and poetic acts; they detail their journey from understanding the dominant, structuring discourse of authenticity of an Indonesian cultural performance within their Perth migrant community to employing alternate ways and, ultimately, successfully engaging with the discourse. In particular, I examine how they strategically self-essentialized the cultural features of their choreography as political acts of agency aligning them with the cultural politics of the consulate by performing on their own terms for an Australian audience. Along the way they had a lot of fun doing what they loved, found joy in embodying their interpretations of Indonesian cultural dances as poetic acts of agency, and at times challenged the very gendered stereotypes associated with them. It is this joy that encapsulates Bakhtin’s state-
ment that those who seek to make meaningful lives for themselves on the margins of structures of domination embody resistance and mischief as playful and pleasurable acts (quoted in Ortner 2006:114).

As a second-generation, Indonesian migrant in Australia growing up in Canberra, Australia’s capital city, I was able to gain an insight into the Indonesian migrant women dancers’ lives through fieldwork in Perth as part of my Doctoral candidature in anthropology. I spent over a year with them, from the end of 2006 to the end of 2007, and then continued the engagement through return visits. When in Perth I spent most of my weekdays practising the dances with them as well as engaging in their social and family lives, while weekends were spent performing with the group. In 2007 and during my return trips until 2011, I performed at 18 venues in the city and suburbs of Perth as well as its surrounding areas. I was an amateur with minimal experience in dancing and performing Indonesian dances, very much like most of the amateur Indonesian housewives.

In my research I found that rehearsing and performing dance as an ethnographic practice enabled me to gain more insight into how my research participants understood and interacted with their world, to experience bodily what they experienced. It also made my participants feel that I was experiencing what they were experiencing. Through the bodily praxis of rehearsing I gained more understanding of how participants who were amateur or had not danced professionally in Indonesia were able to express an embodied cultural understanding, and how they communicated the poetics of authenticity. The dancers reached a point where they had rehearsed and performed the dance so much that it became, in their words, an expression of the inner moods and feelings evoked by the various accompanying Indonesian songs instead of just a series of movements. They attributed this connection between music, movement, and inner feelings to a new sense of belonging and identity as an Indonesian, but more specifically, as an Indonesian in Perth.

The Indonesian Migrant Association and the Dance Group’s ‘Inauthentic’ Created Boat Dance

When I described my research over a dance rehearsal dinner, dance group leader Santi and other dancers gave me suggestions on whom to speak to about

3 See Visweswaran 1994 for the positioning of second-generation migrants in fieldwork amongst women of the same cultural background.
Indonesian cultural performance in Perth. ‘You should ask Pak Edi about the Indonesian migrant community and cultural performances. You have met him; he’s the community’s sesepuh (respected elder) and founder of the Indonesian Community Association. He’s the expert, as he used to also be a dancer’, enthused Santi. ‘He said that I was the best dancer after our boat dance performance, you know, at the Indonesian Community Association event in February. He told me I was the most skilled and luwes (graceful).’

Santi was not the only dancer in the group who kept referring me to Pak Edi. Three others also thought highly of him, as he had at some point in the early 1990s taught three of the dancers as part of a dance class run by Dharma Wanita. When I spoke to Pak Edi, however, he did not like Santi’s representation of his opinions. He referred to the dancers as amateur ‘housewives’ and described the boat dance that they performed in February 2007 as a ‘created’ dance (tari kreasi), not an ‘authentic’, traditional dance. When I asked him to explain, he claimed that there was no such thing as an ‘authentic’ Indonesian traditional dance. There are only ‘authentic’ regional dances, such as the Melayu dances from Sumatra, or the Sundanese dances from West Java—incidentally the dances in which he trained or that originate from his home region (West Java).

The conundrum over discussing authenticity in fieldwork is that researchers may see that research participants’ ideas of ‘authentic’ dance performances were essentialist notions. By contrast, the anthropologist’s approach in understanding the participants’ worldview through the practices enacted in their daily lives would maintain that research participants have more than essentialist understandings of truths; to argue otherwise would be demeaning to their capacity for self-reflection. Although ethnographers reject the quest for authenticity, at the same time they examine the ethnographic process that gives space for the people being studied to question their own authenticity (Bruner 1993). When the people ‘studied’ do reflect on their cultural representations of ‘authenticity’, this can be explained not only in political terms but also in a poetic form as the embodied understanding of everyday ‘truths’. These truths, experienced as poetic embodiments, outweigh what Ram (2000b) calls the politics of representation in a performance of ‘authenticity’. Debates in the field of the anthropology of dance concerning the use and understand-

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4 Personal communication with Santi in December 2010.
5 The Dharma Wanita group in Perth no longer organized dance classes in 2007.
6 Personal communication with Pak Edi in January 2011.
7 For more details about Sundanese male dances, see Spiller 2010.
ing of ‘authenticity’ in cultural performances have focused on the politics of dance versus the poetic embodied experience (Reid 1998; Ram 2000b; Henry, Magowan and Murray 2000).

In separate interviews, two Indonesian Community Association committee members gave similar answers to Pak Edi, and supported his opinion that the performances by the Srikandi dance group were those of amateur housewives and that their ‘traditional’ Indonesian dances were actually ‘inauthentic’, created dances. This is contrary to Santi’s claim that the boat dance she performed for the Indonesian Community Association is an ‘Indonesian’, ‘authentic’, traditional dance in which the dancers represent local fisherfolk who are the subject of the accompanying Javanese song. The difference of opinion between representatives of the migrant institution and the migrant women dancers illustrates the main issue of this article—the way a discourse of ‘authentic’ Indonesian performance is imposed, negotiated, and subverted through various strategic means and what this reveals about the politics of representation and poetic embodied experience between audience and performer.

A postmodern approach to research on the anthropology of performance also holds that there is no such thing as an ‘authentic’ performance—it is all politics of representation (Bruner 1993). Authenticity is seen only as a strategic form of representation by particular interest groups, such as the Indonesian migrant association or the Srikandi housewives’ amateur dance group. Moreover, the researcher cannot meaningfully discuss authenticity because the concept of ‘authentic’ itself is a construction (Bruner 1993). However, contrary to this position, representations of cultural authenticity are important concerns for the groups that anthropologists study (Reid 1998). In other words, people use an idea of authenticity in order to understand what their dance performance reveals about themselves. Therefore, studying what is deemed ‘authentic’ in a community enables the researcher to unravel complex power relations, in this instance between migrant dancers and representatives of the migrant institution staging the Indonesian community’s cultural celebration.

The newly choreographed Indonesian boat dance was performed for the first time at the Indonesian Community Association’s welcoming event in February 2007, in a rented school hall in the inner suburb of Thornley, Perth, where the audience was formed of a large number of Indonesian residents. The Indonesian Community Association, set up in 1974, was one of the first Indonesian community groups in Perth. It is now only one amongst many social groups that

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8 Personal communication with two committee members in January 2011.
have since formed on the basis of specific Indonesian regional identities and religious backgrounds. Prior to the establishment of the Indonesian consulate in 1991, the Indonesian Community Association’s formal function was to help Indonesian migrants settle in Perth. As it is not regional or religion-based this community association now only has a social function, which appeals to members of Indonesian Australian mixed-marriage families such as the Srikandi dancers.

The Srikandi dance group said they were commissioned to perform at this Indonesian Community Association event. However, one of the Indonesian Community Association committee members claimed that the association was merely providing support and encouragement to one of their members, Santi, by allowing her hobby dance group to perform their ‘amateur’ version of an Indonesian dance, a generic boat dance. The boat dance was performed by six women, who danced vigorously—three in male, fishermen’s costumes holding boat paddles and three in Javanese, female, kebaya costumes (lacy tight-fitting embroidered tops and batik sarongs), holding buckets with ‘cut out’ fish decorations. They were imitating fisher folk rowing a boat and catching fish as described in the accompanying Javanese lyrics of the campursari

The Srikandi dancers were trying to affirm their essentialist identity as Indonesian through the performance of a fishermen’s dance with Javanese costumes and song. I argue that the politics of dance can also involve strategic essentialism (Spivak 1987), which holds that such acts of identity positioning can have a powerful positive effect for marginalized subjects, though this may be only temporarily effective at specific historical moments. However, in postmodernism, strategic essentialism has been viewed negatively. This is particularly the case in ethnographies of cultural dance performances for tourists, which argue that strategic essentialism is not necessarily an assertion of power but merely a ‘spectre of authenticity’ (Jolly 1992; Bruner 1993; Picard 1995; Wang 1999; Condevaux 2010). There is an opposition between ‘inauthentic’, staged culture and ‘authentic’ daily life, where ‘authenticity is a projection of tourists’ beliefs, expectations, preferences, stereotyped images and consciousness onto toured objects’ (Wang 1999:335). Nevertheless, dancers in tourist performances are not ‘masking their real selves, becoming only signs for the object of tourism’ (Bruner 1993:321; see also Picard 1995), but they are active and reflective in the social construction of authenticity (Condevaux 2010). Instances of ‘inauthenticity’ therefore (might) show the interaction

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9 See Widodo 1995 for more on campursari, a mix of traditional and popular music.
between dancers, who ‘realize’ that authenticity is being created, and audiences and other interested parties who might see the dances as inauthentic.

Watching the boat dance my Sulawesi companion, who is also a member of the Indonesian Community Association, asked ‘What traditional Indonesian dance is this?’ Having a Javanese father, and therefore understanding some of the lyrics and recognizing the typical Javanese costumes, I replied, ‘I am not sure, but it looks Javanese, the music is definitely Javanese.’ She again asked, ‘Which part of Java?’ I shook my head, not knowing. ‘Must be a created dance (tari kreasi),’ she concluded. With my limited knowledge and abilities in dance I watched this seemingly ‘simple’, created Javanese folk dance, noting to myself that it looked fun, very energetic, and the movements seemed easy [see Figure 1]. A Javanese person later explained to me that the song that accompanies the dance is taught in primary school music lessons and is about the fun weekend activity of taking a boat out from the beach to relax on a Sunday before returning to work the next day. I told my companion that I might be able to learn the dance, as it involved simple movements, and thus become involved and gain the perspective of participant observation of an Indonesian migrant women’s dance group.

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10 Personal communication February 2007.
The following week I joined the Srikandi dance group at rehearsals, which took place twice a week. These were also opportunities for social get-togethers for the women and their families, especially over dinner on a Friday night after rehearsals. The Friday rehearsal always took place at the house of an ex-professional, East Javanese gandrung folk dancer called Inem, which also sometimes coincided with the monthly arisan, a rotating credit association activity, of the dancers. At these rehearsals, though serious about getting their movements right according to the created choreographies, the dancers enjoyed the banter and jokes, especially exaggerating the gyrating movements and teasing each other. At times they would also communicate their pride in gaining new dance skills (bisa melakukan gerakan tarian baru).

At the first Friday dance rehearsal dinner, I also found out that I was not the only member of the audience at the Indonesian Community Association welcoming event who had decided to join the Srikandi dance group after watching the created boat dance. A classically trained Javanese dancer, Ningsih, who had not danced in over 20 years, also expressed interest in joining. She had sat in the front row with a group of her female Indonesian friends, and was especially motivated after hearing a derisive comment by her companion, a committee member of the consulate-sponsored Dharma Wanita. ‘She told me the dance did not look authentic, was very amateurish and only involved gyrating one’s hips in a sexual manner (goyang goyang).’

The Dharma Wanita committee member in Perth’s Indonesian community was communicating her more conservative, Islamic belief that it is not appropriate to have an ibu, or married woman, dance in front of men who are not their relatives, or mukhrim, as it is haram, or sinful and shameful, because they are displaying their bodies. The fact that an Indonesian migrant woman in Perth is dancing at all reinforces the stereotype of her as a ‘bar girl’, not an honoured, domesticated mother/wife, or ibu. Presumably for these reasons, the committee member of the Dharma Wanita found the boat dance inauthentic and an inappropriate representation of Indonesia. As a consulate-sponsored organization, the Dharma Wanita adheres to the Indonesian state gender discourse of ibuism, which encourages women to aspire to become mothers/wives, that was enshrined in the state’s panca darma wanita, or the official paradigm of women’s primary roles during Suharto’s New Order era.

11 Gandrung as a symbolic regional folk dance genre from East Java is performed by women, who imitate the rice goddess Srikandi Sri, sometimes for tourists at international hotels as in the case of Inem, who sees her dancing as a professional career. For more information, see Walbers 1992 and Arps 1993.

12 Personal communication with Ningsih in March 2007.
prior to 1998 (Suryakusuma 1996). Some of the activities of the Dharma Wanita group reinforce their roles in the domestic sphere, while at the same time the women become symbolic guardians of their cultural tradition, for example, by taking part in the more sedate activity of performing in a traditional orchestra by rattling the bamboo *angklung* or playing the *gamelan*, as is the case in Perth.

The journey that the Indonesian migrant women dancers mentioned in this article take, in their performance experience, is inspired by their wish to emulate the women of the Dharma Wanita, whom they see as ideal Indonesian citizens promoting the Indonesian culture overseas. But unlike the group’s committee members, who are mainly wives of consulate staff and thus Indonesian citizens, through their marriages to white Australian men, the dance group women may no longer have Indonesian citizenship or may be permanent residents of Australia. Nevertheless, as Indonesian women they are still equated with being the bearers of, and representatives of, Indonesian cultural and moral values. This puts them in a challenging situation. When the women dancers try to become good citizens and promote Indonesian culture, they are denigrated as amateur housewives. Under the Indonesian consulate’s criteria, these women are not permitted to be legitimate cultural representatives, as the consulate fears they will publicly embarrass the nation. Moreover, they are further denigrated as morally handicapped (*tuna susila*) and suspected of having dubious pasts simply because they are or were married to white Australian men whom, it is assumed, they must have met while working as bar girls or in similarly questionable circumstances.

However, their role as a wife within the family can give them various statuses depending on the cross-cultural context of their transnational life. For the Indonesian women dancers in Perth, doing housework is equated to doing maids’ work and this therefore gives them a low status, equivalent to that of an Indonesian female migrant domestic worker (*tenaga kerja wanita* or *tkw*); had they come from a middle-class Indonesian family, in Indonesia a servant would have done such work. Therefore, as wives of white, Australian men working in the profitable mining industry of Western Australia it was important to project themselves as successful, economically well-off migrant women, even though they do not necessarily have social and cultural capital.

Anthias (1978) refers to the effects of positioning women as feminine within the family as a reflection of a society’s class struggle. Moreover, within the confines of their identity as ‘women’, female opposition takes place, particularly by those who had been stereotyped as passive (Anthias 1978). Performing Indonesian cultural performances, therefore, becomes a means for these migrant women to increase their status and standing in relation to other members of the Indonesian migrant community, and a way to not remain passive.
about their social and cultural disadvantage. However, the negative stereotype associated with being a marriage migrant also hinders their ability to achieve the social status and cultural capital they seek through dance performances. Therefore, as marriage migrants without status and cultural capital the ‘authenticity’ of the amateur dance group housewives’ performance is questioned, in particular by the consulate’s Dharma Wanita committee members.

Recounting the event over dinner, Ningsih commented that at least the women in the dance group were trying to be active and present Indonesian cultural performances, trying to be like the Dharma Wanita women who criticized them. This story was greeted with nods of agreement from the other dancers as well as some stronger responses, such as *Kita kan menari karena cinta kebudayaan Indonesia* (We dance because we love Indonesian culture).¹³ Ningsih then told us it was at that moment, in response to the Dharma Wanita committee member’s criticism, that she decided that being part of an amateur group would be a perfect way for her to restart her dancing career. Being a classically trained Javanese dancer whose opinions were valued, she became a respected member of the group and choreographed a more professional version of the gyrating, created Indonesian boat dance, which was then renamed the Madurese fishermen’s folk dance (described in the article’s second ethnography).

The above account of Srikandi’s Indonesian boat dance and its reception point to several issues on authenticity that have been discussed by scholars of the anthropology of performance and of Indonesian cultural representation in migration. The first is how authenticity is judged by members of the Indonesian migrant community in terms of a hierarchy of value in dance: in other words, a ‘created’ Indonesian boat dance is of less value than a regionally specific dance. The second issue relates to how an ‘authentic’ performance is tied to professional dancers, like the classically trained Ningsih or the folk dancer Inem, not amateur dancers like the majority of the dance group members. The third issue relates to how the Indonesian migrant women dancers in Perth responded to the criticism of being ‘inauthentic’ by saying that they would continue to perform because they were enacting a love of Indonesian dancing. Moreover, they found enjoyment in being dancers through the sociality the group provided and the fun of the dance, such as the teasing and gyrating movements. This experience of enjoyment can be analysed as a ‘poetic’ embodied experience.

The poetics of dance here are discussed with reference to when it feels ‘authentic’ to the dancer through their movement, as is described above, but

¹³ Personal communication March 2007.
it can also be experienced by audience members through their sensory perception; expressing a feeling which is embodied (Ram 2000b). Embodiment is about a way of living or inhabiting the world through one's acculturated body (a subject to culture), or the body of the subject being-in-the-world (Csordas 1990; Merleau-Ponty 1962). An 'authentic' performance can invoke or distil embodied primary experiences or patterns of existence. For example, in a certain cultural context, dance movements might evoke the way a mother nurtures a child. A 'good' dance performance is 'the coming to presence of all kinds of patterns of existence' (Ram 2000b:361) or a performance that gives meaning to the dancers' and the audience's experience of it. In other words, the essence of the everyday is thus turned into an embodied sensation of 'taste' (rasa). Without dismissing primary experiences of the world as poetic forms of 'authenticity' in dance performances, I argue that there are occasions when all interested parties do not share embodied experience as 'authentic'. When confronted with such disjuncture in a performance, the dynamics of power relations within the dancers' community is revealed, in particular the Srikandi dance group's marginalized status as amateurs facing a dominant structuring discourse espoused by their community association.

As mentioned earlier on, when the Indonesian Community Association committee members were separately asked for their views on the Srikandi dance group performance in February 2007, they described their views and experience as watching an unprofessional, 'inauthentic', created Indonesian dance. Although the Indonesian Community Association's appeal amongst mixed-marriage families was its identification as a non-culturally specific social group, its leader and members were empowered to give a representation of Indonesian regional cultural performance the status of 'authentic' at their event. However, the committee members repeatedly labelled the boat dance as a 'created' form imitating Javanese folk dances, with amateurish gyrating movements. An audience member from the Dharma Wanita group also experienced 'inauthenticity' and they communicated their dissatisfaction that they were not seeing an Indonesian cultural performance. The criticism of committee members who were in the audience suggests that they did not experience any embodied cultural feelings, such as nostalgic longing, in response to this particular boat dance, as they might have with other dances, for example, Pak Edi's Sundanese dances that he learnt and performed in Indonesia.14

14 See Ram 2000a and 2000b for a comparative example in the Indian migrant community and her argument that there exists an embodied cultural feeling that is understood by audience and performer, as well as the nostalgic longing which is experienced as phantom limb syndrome by the migrant community.
The dancers felt that they had, to their level of dance knowledge, enacted an ‘authentic’ embodied form of Indonesian cultural performance. This was illustrated within their own group feedback. Ningsih’s negative feedback to the group, however, was one of the instances highlighting their interaction with the dominant and hegemonic structuring discourse of ‘authentic’ Indonesian cultural performance. Ningsih communicated others’ critical opinions and her feedback was highly regarded. Due to her classical background she was valued as a more ‘authentic’ dancer. However, the other dancers reacted to the criticism by pointing to their ‘active’ participation in the world of performance in order to be like the Dharma Wanita women who promoted Indonesian culture. This ethnographic story illustrates the beginning of the dancers’ understanding of the power dynamics in the community between themselves and cultural gatekeepers such as the Migrant Community Association and Dharma Wanita; in particular, it shows how the dancers first became aware of the criticism directed at them for performing ‘authentic’ Indonesian traditional dances. Furthermore, some members of the group applied this knowledge by adapting their boat dance to make it more ‘authentic’, as will be illustrated in the next ethnographic story on the successful rebranding of the Indonesian boat dance into a Madurese fishermen’s folk dance.

The issue of authenticity based on regionally specific dances, danced by classically trained or folk dancers, has been described as the cultural policy of the Indonesian government from the Sukarno era to the New Order (Yampolsky 1995). As previously mentioned, the opinion of Pak Edi (the Migrant Community Association’s founding leader) reflected a view within the Indonesian migrant community that only dances considered regional dances are legitimate representations of ‘authentic’ Indonesian culture in Perth. This is in line with the cultural policy definitions of ‘authentic’ Indonesian culture as ‘old and authentic’, as well as those defined as ‘peaks of culture’, such as court or classical dances (Yampolsky 1995:704). Thus, anything ‘new’ or ‘hybrid’ is categorized as ‘not authentic’. Furthermore, a classification of ‘authenticity’ could be seen as part of postcolonial nations’ (like Indonesia) efforts in valorizing the category of national dance as an idealized emblem of an ‘authentic’, precolonial past (Reid 1998:511). Precolonial identity is thus symbolized in performances for the purpose of ritual activity, beliefs, and customs referred to by the pan-Indonesian term adat.

Nevertheless, there is a shift from traditional, ‘authentic’ dances (some performed overseas) towards large-scale, popular, ‘created’ dances by notable Indonesian choreographers (Murgiyanto 1993). In particular, there is a historical trajectory of large-scale performances of created ‘generic’ Indonesian dances, drawn from the ‘fishermen’ and ‘farmer’ dances popular in the 1950s.
and promoted during President Sukarno’s era (Murgiyanto 1993). Above I discussed the performance by the Srikandi group in February 2007 at the Indonesian Community Association welcoming event of a created, ‘generic’ fishermen dance, which contained elements of dances that were accepted in Indonesia as a valid representation of culture at certain historical moments. However, in a transnational migration context these types of dances were dismissed as inauthentic by those particular Indonesian audiences that represented the dominant, state discourse of authenticity.

The Boat Dance That Became the Madurese Fishermen Folk Dance

The Madurese fishermen folk dance premiered at the Perth Royal Show in September 2007, where Indonesia was the year’s guest nation. ‘Ladies come down to the front stairs for some picture taking with our special guest, the Premier, Mr Alan Carpenter’, said the MC from the Indonesian consulate, waving his arm to usher us dancers in the direction of the front of the stage. We exchanged looks and were all happy and surprised. We had been about to exit the stage after completing our Madurese fishermen’s folk dance routine. ‘Aah [...] beautiful ladies [...] so how was this fishermen’s dance?’, asked the Western Australian premier, addressing the audience that was patiently watching the impromptu photo shoot, while he smiled and nodded to us dancers seated all around him. ‘Very good dance, very lively, it’s the best Indonesian performance we’ve seen today at the Royal Show’, shouted a middle-aged white Australian man seated in the back row. I recalled him introducing himself as an Indonesian high-school language teacher at our previous performance.

The MC then decided it was an opportune time to say to the audience and the premier: ‘Put your hands together again audience for these beautiful, lively Madurese fishermen folk dancers.’ After the applause had died down and the Indonesian consulate staff, the dancers’ spouses, and the premier’s entourage had finished taking photographs, we thanked the premier and bowed again to the audience. As we walked back to the dressing room we could clearly hear the MC thank the premier as he left the performance area: ‘Thank you, Mr Premier, for your visit. Please stay in your seats, audience, for some more Indonesian ‘authentic’ traditional dances.’ Back in the dressing room we couldn’t contain our joy and excitement, with everyone talking at once about how lucky we had been to have our photos taken with the Western Australian premier.

There was not only the prestige of performing at the Perth Royal Show, for the consulate it was also a considerable diplomatic investment being chosen as
the guest nation for the year’s ‘cultural’ theme. As the guest nation, within the showgrounds Indonesia had its own building, which was filled with displays of cultural products, arts and crafts, booths displaying tourism destinations, the Indonesian airline Garuda promoting package tours, and booths manned by representatives of institutions reflecting Indonesian–Australian relations, such as the Australia Indonesia Business Council and the Australia Indonesia Youth Exchange Program. In addition, there was a large area at the end of the building with a stage and seating reserved for the cultural performance. On this occasion, cultural performance and Indonesian–Australian diplomatic relations thus go hand in hand.

During the performers’ meeting at the consulate two months beforehand, the president of the Western Australian branch of the Australia Indonesia Business Council had stated the importance of cultural diplomacy, noting that there should be specific performances from East Java, Western Australia’s sister state. The cultural attaché in turn informed everyone that they had made sure they would have an East Javanese cultural representation by flying in a professional dance troupe from East Java’s capital city, Surabaya. The first two days of the Royal Show over the weekend would be taken up with ‘professional’ performances only. The other days would be for local amateur performances, including our Srikandi group, alternating with professional performances by the East Javanese dance group. These differentiations between the Srikandi amateur group and the professional troupes flown in from East Java are illustrative of the hierarchy of the Indonesian state’s structuring discourse of authenticity espoused by the consulate and the organizer of the Indonesian guest nation cultural programme.

The dressing room was filled with dancers from the East Javanese ‘professional’ troupe, yet we were reluctant to leave the space that shielded us from the noise from the stage so that we could continue with the conversation about our fishermen’s performance and the encounter with the premier. We repeated how the mc from the cultural attaché’s office had called our dance a beautiful and lively Indonesian traditional dance. Santi corrected our recollection, saying that she had heard the mc say that we danced an ‘authentic’ Madurese fishermen’s folk dance. She added that it had been a huge improvement on the previous, ‘aerobic style’ boat dance, thanks to the new choreography provided by the classical dancer Ningsih. Joking with the other dancers, Melati said that even as a male fishermen she looked beautiful because she combined beautiful movements with classic, male poses.

In response, Ningsih said that she believed we danced her choreography with Santi’s input well, because our movements related to the words of the song. Ningsih’s advice was, ‘When the song said that the coconut trees were
swaying, well, you make the upwards hand movements like a swaying coconut tree but you hold your fingers in a classical bent pose; the same for when in the boat, you must make sure when you make a rowing movement that you place your feet in classical poses depending on whether you are male or female, and your arms and body in the downward angular manner typical of Javanese dance. Ningsih then compared what she believed to be our more sophisticated dance to the Srikandi dance group’s previous amateur version, where there was just a lot of ‘jingkrak jingkrak’, or jumping around.

Santi added that the dance was also beautiful because we had all smiled, held our heads high, made eye contact with the audience and kept some of the gyrating movements for the time when the song called for a teasing exchange between male and female. ‘Remember the Madurese are show-offs’, Santi continued, ‘so it’s alright if our movements are bold. We have to look like we are Madurese people, that’s why we wear bright kebaya with lots of gold and big moustaches for the men.’

Having grown up in Surabaya, where there is a large population of Madurese migrants, Santi would tell stories during rehearsals of her ‘show-off and easily angered’ Madurese neighbours, who had moved to the provincial capital of Surabaya, where there are more employment opportunities. Having grown up with these stereotypes, Santi explained to me that the dancers’ Madurese identity was a perfect fit for revitalizing the gyrating ‘boat dance’, as it retained the dance’s bold movements and identified them as the ‘authentic’ movements of the Madurese. Furthermore, through internet searches she found that there is a ‘folk’ dance in Madura known as a ‘fishermen’s dance’. Although she could not find any video clips of this Madurese fishermen’s dance to copy for the performance, the combination of classical Javanese dance movements with bold gyrating movements and the use of a Javanese campursari (children’s) song about a fishing journey as the musical accompaniment was enough to make the dance convincingly ‘authentic’. Santi claimed that she had the right to reinvent the dance, as the song that was used was from the campursari collection she had brought with her from Surabaya. For the Perth Royal Show

15 Personal communication with Ningish, May 2007.
16 Personal communication with Santi, May 2007. Men with big moustaches represent the stereotype of the East Javanese ‘strong man’ rebel leader, or preman. For a more detailed discussion on representations of the preman, specifically in relation to the East Javanese horse trance dance and the reog, where the dance troupe leaders are known to be ‘strong men’. See Wilson 1999 for more details on ‘strong men’ and reog.
17 Santi’s teaching of ‘bold movements’ came from her training in Perth as a belly dancer.
organized by the consulate, Santi thus re-titled the boat dance as the Madurese fishermen's folk dance. Santi gleefully pronounced that we were onto a winning formula of classical-style folk dance and a professional, engaging manner of dancing. These improvements to our dance therefore meant we had learnt from our past, embarrassing amateur performances (the boat dance) and this time our dance was accepted as more 'authentic'.

The dancers in this ethnographic illustration negotiated the dominant discourse of 'authentic' cultural performance through political and poetic actions. Their political act was to strategically essentialize a regionally specific cultural identity through the Madurese fishermen's folk dance. Their poetic act was to embody the stereotyped beliefs of the Madurese in the dance movements. With the objective in mind of elevating their status to professionals performing ‘authentic’ dances, the migrant women were interacting with the structuring discourse of performing a regionally specific dance to be considered an ‘authentic’ Indonesian traditional performance. Their ‘actions’ showed them being amenable to changing their dance according to the Indonesian migrant community and the consulate’s criterion of ‘authenticity’. However, they were ‘playing’ with, and pushing the boundaries of, the criterion to suit their circumstances—that of amateur, gyrating dancers with a classically trained choreographer. Their method of negotiating agency can be seen as engaging in an innovative way with the consulate and the Indonesian migrant community’s discourse of authenticity. The innovation was to invent an affiliation with the Madurese and its associated folk performance that passed as ‘authentic’.

Moreover, the Indonesian migrant women's version of the dance shows how they have control over how they represent themselves as Indonesians—the performer’s 'agency in self-representation' (Stephenson 2008). Representing their version of the dance as a Madurese fishermen's folk dance was also strategic, done at an opportune time made available to them through the Indonesian 'guest nation' performance at the Perth Royal Show.

How the Indonesian boat dance was reinvented as the Madurese folk fishermen's dance by the Indonesian migrant women dancers in Perth not only shows their interaction with the structuring discourse of Indonesia's cultural policy, but also reveals that authenticity is simultaneously a political act and a poetic embodied experience. ‘Authenticity’ can be shared between dancers, audiences, and other interested parties, where performers might be more active in this process than audiences (Condevaux 2010). Various actors ‘negotiate authenticity’ (Condevaux 2010) such that political and poetic forms coexist and complement each other. Although some audience members at the Indonesian Community Association event experienced inauthenticity, the ethno-
graphic stories in this article show that political and poetic forms coexist, reflecting the migrant women dancers’ agency interacting with the structuring discourse of authenticity. Thus, the experience of authenticity is not absolute but is made up of different perspectives of a performance. Furthermore, this article shows how the migrant women dancers could ‘deceive’ the cultural gatekeepers into accepting a dance as ‘authentic’ once they knew the formula, and were even able to adopt various versions of ‘authenticity’, depending on the structure of the performance and the audience—either the Indonesian migrant community or multicultural Australian audiences.

The photos taken of the dancers with the Western Australian premier became prized possessions and evidence of their believed increase in status [see Figure 2]. For some of the dancers, the photo was synonymous with winning a trophy, which was how it was displayed in both Ningsih’s and Santi’s houses. Ningsih’s photo was blown up to almost A3 size, framed, and placed on top of the display cabinet in her living room. As her townhouse was not large and the lounge, dining room, kitchen, and entrance area were open plan, one could see the photo from the front door. It became the central focus, displayed for all to see, and this showed its significance. In Santi’s house, the photo, though not as big as Ningsih’s, also had an important place on the wall of the formal dining room. It was framed and placed opposite a cabinet full of expensive table china for important guests to see. It was also sent to family members, relatives, and friends in Indonesia by post and email and talked about on the phone by the dancers. Photos were also displayed on individual dancers’ social networking sites.

The photo with the premier was not only synonymous with the winning of a trophy, it also became a symbol of triumph and thus a status symbol. Moreover, the dancers maintained that it was proof of their elevated status, thus recognizing their promotion from amateur performer to professional dancer. In their conversations with families and friends in Indonesia and Perth, the dancers were able to describe themselves as ‘international artists’, and in the fashion of artists, they would display their photos with public figures or well-known politicians to prove their status.

The Indonesian migrant women dancers, whose focus was on Perth and whose immediate family were living in Perth, wanted status within the Perth Indonesian migrant community; they also wanted to increase their status in the eyes of the Indonesian consulate and related transnational institutions such as the Dharma Wanita and the migrant association. What was important for these Indonesian women was the ability to reassure their relatives and friends from time to time of their status and ‘good life’ in Australia, which they could achieve by sending a photo. However, this photo was also prominently displayed in their
homes in Perth and was shown to fellow members of their migrant community. The migrants’ objective of gaining status within certain communities shows which localities they identify with and feel they belong (or want to belong) to.

Identifying as Madurese as part of the representation of Indonesian ‘national’ culture was a strategic invention on the part of the dancers. The women were involved, to a small degree, in cultural, group-specific socialization. However, they identified more as Indonesians when participating in cultural performances in their multicultural host country. Furthermore, by dancing Indonesian traditional performances at Indonesian community events and Australian multicultural events, they perceived themselves as international artists undertaking cultural ambassadorial work. They described their performances as promoting Indonesian culture for tourism purposes, and teaching culture to a community that offers an Indonesian language programme in its school curriculum. This is reflected in the Indonesian displays at the Perth Royal Show. For these women, the most important identity factor was not their cultural group; it was being an Indonesian performing cultural ambassadorial work as an extension of the consulate’s mission, as the Dharma Wanita
would do through their traditional musical ensemble and the migrant association did in their cultural events.

**Conclusion**

This article has highlighted the need to address in alternative ways the concept of ‘authenticity’ in the discipline of anthropology. It does so by discussing ‘authenticity’ in relation to Indonesian cultural performances by female marriage migrants. This discussion, drawing on ethnographic data gathered with a migrant ‘housewives’ dance group in Perth, Western Australia, extends the debate of ‘political’ versus ‘poetic’ performance. The question addressed in the article on how the research participants express authenticity and why this is important to the study of the anthropology of performance is explored in four ways.

Firstly, in the debate surrounding authenticity in the anthropology of performance, the concept of ‘authenticity’ is important as it largely structures the discourse in the communities that anthropologists research. ‘Authenticity’ shows the dynamics of power relations; in this particular case, the dominance of (or extensions of) the Indonesian state in a migration context. The discourse whereby regional folk dances are considered more ‘authentic’ than created, ‘national’ dances is propagated through (1) the Indonesian Community Association which, up to the early 1990s, had acted like the consulate; (2) the Indonesian consulate-sponsored women’s group, Dharma Wanita; and (3) the consulate itself, particularly at an event they organized whereby Indonesia was the ‘guest nation’ at the Perth Royal Show.

Secondly, this article argues that ‘authenticity’ in performance does not only need to be expressed as either a political act or a poetic manifestation, but can be expressed as both a political and poetic experience by marginal groups. In the case of the Indonesian migrant women’s dance group, their marriage migration experience enabled them to express their agency in various ways through engaging with this structuring discourse. In the first ethnographic example, the dancers’ reactions were indicative of meaning-making in the lives of those in the margins of a community. They responded to criticisms by citing their active participation, pride, and enjoyment in the performance of their version of an Indonesian cultural dance and the socializing that the performance involved. Their attitude embodied a form of resistance, pleasure, and playfulness.

Thirdly, the topic of ‘authenticity’ was discussed as a structuring discourse in which the forms of agency enacted by those interacting with it come from
a journey of understanding. In this specific case, the journey consisted of the migrant women's past performance experiences, audiences' reactions, and organizers' objectives in holding these events.

The last ethnographic example detailed the successful, professional reinvention of the dance within the category of ‘authentic’ Indonesian dance performance. Santi’s idea to rebrand the boat dance as a Madurese fishermen's folk dance was shown to express both the political and poetic forms of authenticity. The dancers employed strategic essentialism by naming and imbuing stereotypic body movements associated with being Madurese. At the same time, they lifted their performance to a more professional standard by adding classical movements, and movements that illustrated the song’s narrative. Thus the dancers set about improving their technical skills. A poetic form of authenticity in dance performance arguably does not exist in the case of these dancers’ recreated Madurese fishermen’s folk dance, as they were not Madurese, and it was an invented identification. However, the dancers believed they were embodying the bold movements typical of the Madurese as they were acting in line with the shared (stereotypical) understanding of the Madurese as being ‘show-offs’. Furthermore, the dancers enjoyed, and felt positive about, embodying the bold, gyrating movements. The reinvention of the dance by ‘professional’ folk dancers thus included both political and poetic forms of authenticity.

Lastly, these agentive actions of political and poetic expressions of authenticity are also a means for these women to gain an elevated status as a professional dancer, and to achieve the respect of the consulate staff as official representatives of the nation. As individuals on the margins of their community, the dancers desired recognition in this community that paralleled their desire for recognition by the Indonesian consulate in Perth. Calling themselves ‘international artists’ after their successful Perth Royal Show performance, they evoked the further objective of gaining social and cultural capital, which, they believed, would elevate their status from that of ‘marriage migrants’ to ‘cultural ambassadors’. The contribution of this article is thus to show that although an Indonesian, state-structuring discourse of ‘authenticity’ in cultural performance exists in a migration context outside of Indonesia, those who are positioned in the margins of the community are able to use this space to enact their own forms of agency, based on their experiences and objectives, to express both political and poetic forms of ‘authenticity’.
References


